

INFORMATION REPORT INFORMATION REPORT

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

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COUNTRY Poland

REPORT

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SUBJECT Aircraft Accidents in the
Polish Air Force

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1. A report containing information on the major causes of aircraft accidents in the Polish Air Force and listing certain accidents known

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Aircraft Accidents in the Polish Air Force

General Information

1. Aircraft accidents in the Polish Air Force (PAF) were attributed to three major causes: pilot error, defective equipment, and faulty maintenance. Pilot errors were usually the result of not adhering to current flight rules and regulations and were adjudged as evidence of a lack of discipline. Pilots often engaged in horseplay, such as buzzing the homes of acquaintances or approaching too close to tow aircraft during gunnery practice to either scare the tow pilot or in an attempt to get a higher score. Errors were also committed during landing approaches whereby pilots would attempt to execute a "fancy" final approach, even though they did not possess the experience or the ability to do so. A lack of proper training was also a factor in pilot errors. Pilots often became lost during cross-country flights and at night failed to properly interpret their instruments, even though those who were authorized to fly at night were supposedly experienced pilots. Nevertheless, pilots who were in their early twenties were generally more involved in accidents, especially those who had recently completed pilot training.
2. Defective equipment was the second major cause of aircraft accidents. This was especially true in Polish manufactured MIGs (Lim's) which proved to be more defective than their Soviet manufactured counterpart. Common Lim defects were the malfunction of the hydraulic system caused generally by ruptured lines, engine overheating, and breakdown of high-pressure fuel pumps. Tire blowouts occurred quite often even when not subjected to excessively hard landings. Engines froze and quit because of improper lubrication whereby the hydraulic fluid leaked into the lubricating oil. Since the Lim was the most common aircraft in the PAF, it was involved in the most accidents. The first series of Lim's manufactured in Poland was by far the worse and the subsequent series, although improved, still left much to be desired if one compared them with Soviet-manufactured MIGs.

its hydraulic system was the
constant source of trouble.
denoted the MIG-15 or Lim-1.

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and located as follows: immediately to the right of the aircraft identifying number on the fuselage's forward section; on each flap, under each wing near the fuselage; under the horizontal stabilizer; and on the rudder. All aircraft which belonged to

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3. Aircraft accidents were seldom attributed to faulty maintenance. Maintenance personnel, mechanics in particular, were well trained and very reliable.¹

Flying Safety

4. Regulations prescribed that all air force units should devote approximately one hour every Monday morning to flying safety lectures. The regiment chief of staff generally conducted these lectures, which were attended by all officers and regular air force NCOs. During such lectures, the chief of staff read aloud a series of reports pertaining to aircraft accidents with a detailed description of the place, time, and circumstances under which each occurred. Also included in the reports was a statement of the disciplinary action taken against the responsible individuals, if any had been taken. Also included in flying safety lectures were reports which pertained to new techniques and various other aviation subjects. These reports or orders as they were officially called, originated at Air Force Headquarters in Warsaw and were transmitted to the regiments in the form of encrypted teletype messages. There were three main categories of reports; one dealt with pilots, the second with maintenance, and the third with equipment. In conjunction with these three subjects, reports were generally accompanied by specific orders to certain unit personnel. For instance, if a pilot crashed because of faulty maintenance, such a report was always followed by an order to the maintenance personnel which specified what action they were to take to eliminate similar faulty maintenance in their unit. Accidents which occurred in flight schools were not discussed during flying safety lectures, since the flying performed there could not be compared with regular unit operations.

Aircraft Accidents - 1956, 1957 and 1958

5. The majority of accidents described below occurred in units or airfields. However, percentage-wise, these units did not have more accidents than others;

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- a. In March 1958, Second Lt. Waldemar BENKOWSKI, a pilot in the 4th Fighter-Bomber Regiment, crashed in a MIG-15 at Goleniew Airfield (N 53-35, E 14-54). The accident occurred during simulated air combat conducted at an altitude below that prescribed. Following an unknown maneuver, Benkowski went into a spin and could not recover. The accident resulted in a total loss of life and aircraft. The pilot of the other airplane involved in the dogfight exercise was awaiting court martial action. It was charged that he had not complied with rules and regulations, and that, being the more experienced pilot of the two, he should not have allowed the exercise to take place at a non-prescribed altitude.
- b. In March 1958, Lt. GRUSZKA (fnu), a pilot in the 5th Fighter-Bomber Regiment stationed at Bydgoszcz Airfield³, ran his MIG-15 off the side of the runway upon landing and destroyed the main landing gear and one wing. He was not injured. The accident was attributed to faulty maintenance; the brakes had been improperly adjusted and had caused one wheel to grab.
- c. In February 1958, a pilot of the same 5th Regiment lost a wheel during take-off and crashed, causing serious damage to his MIG-15; he escaped injury. An investigation disclosed that the accident was caused by a broken axle which had been cracked for some time. The maintenance personnel claimed that it had been impossible for them to find the fissure because of the lack of proper equipment such as magnifying glasses. No one was disciplined.
- d. In early spring 1957, Second Lt. Bogdan MATYSIAK, a pilot in the 25th Fighter Regiment⁴ at Pruszcz Airfield (N 54-15, E 18-40), experienced a flame-out as a result of his improper use of the throttle in a MIG-15 bis. He restarted the engine, but in his haste or panic he did not follow instructions and experienced a second flame-out just as he was coming in to land. The loss of speed resulted in an extremely hard landing, damaging the landing gear and part of the fuselage. The engine was a total loss. The pilot was charged with equipment unfamiliarity and was confined to his quarters for two weeks.
- e. In the summer of 1957, Captain SROKA (fnu), the deputy commander for pilotage of the 25th Fighter Regiment at Pruszcz Airfield, and a lieutenant (name unrecalled), who was the regimental deputy commander for navigation, crashed upon landing following the collapse of their UT-MIG-15 landing gear. Serious damage resulted to the aircraft. The findings of the ensuing investigation were that the pilot who performed the landing (the lieutenant was the pilot) had not checked his landing warning light. The captain was exonerated of all charges since there was no warning light panel in his cockpit. The lieutenant was found guilty of negligence and his flight rating was reduced from second class pilot to third class.

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- f. In 1957, a UT-MIG-15 flown by two pilots stationed at Sochaczew Airfield (N 52-13, E 20-18) collided in mid-air with the package of a balloon allegedly sent aloft [redacted] 50X1-HUM
[redacted] The collision sent the aircraft crashing to the ground. The two pilots were killed. The balloon presumably also fell. 50X1-HUM
- g. In 1957, a pilot stationed either at Mierzecice Airfield (N 50-29, E 19-05) or Balice Airfield (N 50-05, E 19-48) lost his bearings during a storm and crashed his MIG-15bis into a mountain near the Czechoslovak border, killing himself and demolishing the aircraft. Prior to the accident, he had been in radio contact with his base and had been instructed to bail out; he elected instead to attempt a forced landing.
- h. In April 1957, a pilot of the 4th Fighter-Bomber Regiment at Bydgoszcz Airfield over-ran the runway and crashed into an approach light, severely damaging his MIG-15. A ruptured hydraulic line was adjudged the cause of the accident.
- i. In early 1957, a MIG-15bis flown by a pilot stationed at Balice Airfield developed a leak in the hydraulic system; as a result of this the hydraulic fluid mixed with the cockpit's pressurized air, and totally obscured the pilot's vision, canopy and instruments. The pilot was instructed to jettison the canopy, but because he was not wearing goggles he could not comply. He was escorted back to the airfield by two other aircraft. Once over the field and ready to land, he jettisoned the canopy. However, the stream of air rushing into the cockpit caused the dirt and sand accumulated on the cockpit floor to whirl and strike the pilot in the face and eyes, temporarily blinding him. He managed to circle the field several times until he partially recovered his eyesight and was finally able to land. In landing, however, he damaged the landing gear and fuselage. Following this accident, a new regulation was implemented in the PAF whereby the wearing of goggles became compulsory.
- j. In the summer of 1956, a pilot of the 11th Fighter Regiment stationed at Debrzno Airfield (N 53-32, E 17-16), went into a dive in a MIG-15bis during a maneuver in simulated air combat; he never levelled off and crashed. The accident resulted in a total loss of life and aircraft. It was attributed to defective controls on the part of the manufacturer.
- k. In 1956, Second Lt. MAKOWSKI (fnu), a pilot in the 25th Fighter Regiment at Pruszcz Airfield, lost his way while ferrying a UT-MIG-15 from Pruszcz Airfield to Radom Airfield (N 51-23, E 21-13) and landed in a cow pasture when he ran out of fuel. Instead of utilizing his navigational aids, the pilot had elected to follow the railroad tracks to Warsaw

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from where he had intended to follow the line to Radom. However, he became confused over Warsaw and took the wrong railroad line. Since he had chanced a normal landing with the gear down and the aircraft was only slightly damaged, disciplinary action against him was light; he received a minor stockade sentence and lost his third-class pilot rating.

- l. In early 1956, an IL-10 of the 30th Regiment of Naval Aviation crashed into a house in the vicinity of Wrszesz Airfield (N 54-24, E 18-36) when it attempted to land after engine failure. Both the pilot and gunner, plus a number of civilians, lost their lives in the mishap. The accident was attributed to a shattered engine valve.
- m. In mid-1956, another IL-10 of the above regiment crashed into the sea, drowning the pilot and gunner. The aircraft was recovered. An investigating committee ruled that the pilot had not been watching his instruments and had gradually lost altitude.
- n. In the summer of 1956, Lt. WIECIASZEK (fnu), a pilot in the 25th Fighter Regiment at Pruszcz Airfield and flying a MIG-15bis, shot off, during gunnery practice, the horizontal stabilizers of the tow aircraft, which was also a MIG-15bis and was piloted by Second Lt. UNGAREK (fnu); the latter pilot managed to land safely after several unsuccessful attempts. The accident was attributed to carelessness on the part of Wieciaszek who was reprimanded and grounded for two weeks; in pilot circles, Wieciaszek was known to be a poor shot. However, because of his active membership in the Communist Party, he later became, and was still in 1958, the 25th Regiment's chief of aerial gunnery.
- o. In 1956, a pilot of the 1st Fighter Regiment stationed at Boernerowo Airfield lost his way flying a MIG-15bis and made a belly landing in a farmer's field, heavily damaging the aircraft and seriously injuring himself.
- p. In February 1956, Second Lt. PRZESLAWSKI (fnu), a pilot in the 25th Fighter Regiment at Pruszcz, lost his bearings in cloud formations during a cross-country flight in a MIG-15bis after a failure of his electrical system resulted in a navigational aid malfunction. In accordance with prescribed regulations, the pilot proceeded, prior to attempting an emergency landing, to drop his auxiliary fuel tanks and empty his guns. At the very moment he squeezed the trigger, he was flying in clear skies over Malbork Airfield (N 54-02, E 19-08) unaware of his position and causing panic below. He then proceeded to a cow pasture about four kilometers away from the Malbork runway and executed a belly landing. Follow-

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ing the accident, the pilot was confined to his quarters for a period of two weeks for having failed to see the airfield. Regulations specifically stated that no equipment should be dropped and no gun should be fired over a populated area.

- q. In 1956, a pilot stationed at Malbork Airfield crashed and killed himself following the partial disintegration of his MIG-15bis shortly after take-off. The accident was caused by a mechanic who, a few days prior to the fatal flight, had started and run the engine of the aircraft during a periodical inspection but had neglected to remove the intake cover. As a result the turbine had been damaged from the intense heat and lack of air. Although mechanics were seldom prosecuted, this one, because he failed to report his mistake and at first denied the faulty action, was court-martialed and received a prison sentence of several years.
- r. In the summer of 1955, a naval pilot stationed at Babie Doly Airfield (N 54-35, E 18-23) overran the runway in a PO-2 and fell into the sea approximately 50 meters from the end of the runway. The accident was caused by a group of mechanics who had decided to replace the aircraft's tail skid with a wheel, thus in their opinion modernizing the airplane. Since the tail skid was a PO-2's sole brake, the installation of the wheel eliminated this feature. The pilot who was to test the new tail wheel figured that, although he had no brakes, by landing on one end of the runway the aircraft would somehow stop before reaching the other end of the strip. He did execute a perfect landing at one end of the runway amid the cheers of the mechanics, but the airplane did not stop. The PO-2 was never recovered; the pilot was fished out of the water alive. No one was prosecuted following the accident since it was ruled that the responsible parties had had good intentions and had only used their initiative and ingenuity in an attempt to make improvements.

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